

UINTAH BASIN

Growth without Bounds

By Janine S. Creager



Utah's Uintah Basin, located in the eastern part of the state, encompasses more than 8,000 square miles and three counties: Uintah, Duchesne and Daggett. With familiar destination locations such as Dinosaur National Monument, Flaming Gorge and the Ashley National Forest, the region is well-known for its recreational opportunities. But with a growing energy industry combined with first-rate educational facilities taking hold in these counties, the Basin is no longer just a place to visit and recreate, it is a place to live and grow.



UTAH LEGISLATORS VISITING DUCHESNE COUNTY'S OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

FAST FACTS:

Counties: Daggett, Duchesne, Uintah

Major Cities: Vernal (7,960), Roosevelt (4,553), Duchesne (1,481), Manila (304)

Regional Civilian Labor Force: 23,162

Per Capita Income: \$26,169 (Duchesne) \$19,088 (Daggett), Uintah (\$24,234)

Top Private-Sector Employers: Duchesne County School District, Ashley Valley Medical Center, New Field Exploration Co., Second Nature Therapeutic, Colletts Recreation Service, Bureau of Reclamation, National Forest Service, Flaming Gorge Corp. Je Merit Constructors Inc., Ute Indian Tribe, Uintah School District

Average Price of Homes, Year End 2006:

Uintah Basin-\$172,132

UINTAH COUNTY

When asked what is great about the county where he serves as the CEO of the Uintah Economic Development Special Service District, Robert T. Behunin answers with a resounding, "You name it! If it's in Uintah County or in the Uintah Basin, for that matter, it's great. There is a great deal of activity related to the energy industry and it is supplying the fuel for other positive things as well."

While Duchesne County ranks number one in the production of oil, Uintah County adds other natural resources to the list, including gas. Oil shale and tar sands are also potential energy resources.

Combined with these assets is the commitment the county has undertaken toward education. A prime example is the 138 acres donated by a local philanthropist for Utah State University's Uintah Basin Regional Campus.

The Uintah Basin Regional campus is USU's most developed regional campus, and with buildings in Roosevelt and Vernal, USU is uniquely poised to help the Uintah Basin grow and develop.

The Uintah Basin Applied Technology College and USU are building a joint facility in Vernal on the donated property, which will house programs from both institutions. The facility will also play host to a center for the Utah Science Technology and Research (USTAR) program passed by the state legislature in 2006. USTAR is a financial commitment by the state to bring top-notch professors and researchers to Utah to expand on the success of the state's research universities to create and commercialize innovative technologies. The Eastern Utah Outreach and Innovation Center of the program is located in Vernal at the Utah State University Uintah Basin regional campus.

Besides education, Uintah County is still a booming tourist attraction, with Dinosaur National Monument and the Utah Field House of Natural History in Vernal as two popular stops. Here, visitors, local students and scientific researchers can have a hands-on experience to learn more about the geologic roots of the region.

"All the recent activity and surges

have created some tremendous opportunities," says Behunin. "In the past, Uintah County was doing well to merely react to situations. Now we feel much more proactive and we are taking strategic approaches which will benefit the local area and the state."

DUCHESNE COUNTY

The signs of prosperity in a community may be more subtle than one might think, according to Irene Hansen, director of Duchesne County economic development. "Early on, prosperity means little things like getting new shoes and getting your teeth fixed," she says. The new money that is allowing people to do everything from getting health care work done to taking a first vacation is due in large measure to the expansion of the oil and gas industry in the county. As the number one oil producer in the state, Duchesne is seeing a growth spurt with robust exploration and development in the energy industry that is attracting a lot of investors.

"Wages are about double what the state average is," Hansen explains. In addition, the expanding economy in one main industry paves the way for other professionals, including attorneys, medical personnel and retail outlets.

"For a rural area, [these economic changes are] bringing in some of the top technology. A very exciting outcome of that prosperity is that people are staying here for their services. And they need those services," she adds.

With close proximity to the Wasatch Front, the Uintah Basin offers a retirement destination for some, while providing a little piece of paradise near their primary residence for those still employed. And for tele-commuters, Duchesne County affords a rural lifestyle within easy striking distance for those occasional meetings at the office.

Though rustic in nature, there is nothing rural about the county's connectivity to the rest of the world. "Our technology provider is called the Uintah Basin Telecommunications Association, a co-op," Hansen says. "Because of that investment going back into the economy, we have a high level of technology available to us, including DSL and wireless capa-

bilities."

Whatever the reason people come to Duchesne County, all residents receive myriad advantages of living in the area, including access to 15 destination resorts, while at the same time pouring plenty of dollars into the local economy.

"They fall in love with the area and say, 'Now, how can I make a living?' People want their five to 10 acres," says Hansen. "They want 'their piece of recreational property and to have some privacy and solitude. To the county, this new money is a breath of fresh air."

DAGGETT COUNTY

Nestled in the northeast corner of Utah is beautiful Daggett County. At just under 700 square miles, the county is one of the smallest in the state, but is filled with spectacular scenery, unlimited recreational playgrounds and potential for growth.

"The atmosphere is generally peaceful and quiet, the scenery is beautiful and the air is clean," says Brian Raymond, Daggett County Commission assistant and economic development director. "The beautiful surroundings provide opportunities for abundant recreation."

The economy of the county revolves around three main industries: government work, including the U.S. Forest Service, county and school district, and the town of Manila; agriculture businesses, which comprises cattle and feed; and tourism.

"Although Flaming Gorge and the Green River are well known and regularly visited during the summer months, there are still lots of out-of-the-way places one can visit and enjoy," says Raymond, who adds that Daggett County is 90 percent federally and state owned, with the Ashley National Forest providing the biggest chunk of land. "There are opportunities for photography, hiking, biking, ATV riding, horseback riding, fishing, boating, swimming, camping, snow shoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, bird watching and wildlife viewing and doing a whole lot of nothing except relaxing," says Raymond.

To meet the growing demand of outdoor enthusiasts, plans are underway to update and remodel several

key resorts in the area: Trout Creek Flies and Twisted Timber Retreat are adding cabins to their facilities; the Lucerne Marina and the Flaming Gorge Recreation Services are adding additional RV spaces; and the Cedar Springs Marina and the Flaming Gorge Resort have been updating their facilities.

In addition, says Raymond, "SITLA (the State and Institutional Trust Lands Administration) has been approached about leasing/selling some of their land within the county, and Daggett County is updating its General Plan to look at development opportunities in and around Dutch John and throughout the county."

Although the economy of the area may still be in its infancy, the potential of Daggett County is limitless.

"The benefits involve being in a beautiful area and away from the hustle and bustle of the city," says Raymond. "The atmosphere and the people who work hard to make a go of it in this small county, which is off the beaten path, are another benefit to doing business in the area."

While Daggett, Uintah and Duchesne Counties are thriving, independent entities all on their own, the three areas also sense an interdependence that benefits the Uintah Basin region.

"There is a keen sense of cooperation and unification in the Basin," says Behunin. "There are long-standing partnerships between the three counties, and there are new ones being forged all the time that will benefit the Basin and the state as well."



DUCHESNE COUNTY FAIR RODEO

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Robert T. Behunin

CEO OF THE UINTAH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SPECIAL SERVICE DISTRICT



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